

The All-Ireland Programme for Immigrant Parents

Fourth Interim Report for the Project Management Committee

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1.1. Introduction

This is the fourth interim report by the Child and Family Research Centre, NUI, Galway, for the Project Management Committee (PMC) of the All-Ireland Programme for Immigrant Parents. The programme aims to develop a range of parenting information, and provide training and resources for immigrant families and those agencies and individuals who work with immigrant parents on the island of Ireland.

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) is the lead organisation responsible for the first phase of the project. This involves developing a resource pack and learning tools for service providers working with immigrant parents. The resource pack includes jurisdiction-specific information on services, legislation and policy; general teaching materials influenced by a review of parenting programmes to be used by practitioners; and a series of aids and supports for suitably trained practitioners in utilising the resources.

As part of this project, the PMC appointed the Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway (CFRC) to undertake a formative evaluation of the project. This evaluation has seven aims as outlined in the tender document. These are:

- Consultation and Engagement of Immigrant parents in both the development and uptake of resources;
- Partnership working and development on a multi-sectoral and cross-border basis in regards to the PMC, and more generally in meeting the needs of immigrant parents;
- The Training and Support of Practitioners in delivering the programme;
- Quality and Dispersal of Project Products;
- Identification and Inclusion of existing Good Practice/Innovation at a National and International Level;
- Lead Organisation Delivery in Terms of Process, Timescales, Value for Money and Accountability;
- Mainstreaming of Learning and Good Practice;

As part of the evaluation process, and as set out in the CFRC evaluation plan circulated to PMC members, a number of actions have been specified under each of the above headings. This report addresses two of the evaluation criteria above. The first section details the findings from a parent focus group conducted in September 2008. The second, longer section addresses the workings of the PMC over the summer and Autumn period of 2008 and was undertaken at the specific request of the PMC.

2.1.Consultation and engagement of immigrant parents in both the development and uptake of resources

As part of the evaluation process, the CFRC undertook a focus group (in addition to those already detailed in the third interim report) with a group of parents who participated in the research which was to underpin the development of the resources. As outlined in the third interim report for the evaluation, parents were asked a set of questions which related to five thematic areas:

- Participant's knowledge of the ALLiPIP project;
- The process around the consultation;
- The content of the consultation process;
- The feedback received from the consultation process and about the project
- overall;
- The resources themselves – content and uptake.

2.1.2 Findings

Respondents became involved in the research process for ALLiPIP through the leader of a project they were members of. This leader was approached indirectly by the ISPPC (through a member of the Advisory Committee of the ALLiPIP project) and asked to facilitate a focus group with parents. Participants knew relatively little about the project, but were aware that the researchers wanted to hear their experiences of parenting and in engaging with a range of different services as parents. To this extent, participants indicated to the evaluation team of being very comfortable with the research process and partaking in it.

The parents highlighted that most of the questions tended to focus on service experience. However, others indicated that they were asked about their more general experience of living away from their country of origin, and in particular how they dealt with language difficulties while trying to access services. The participants indicated to the evaluation team that the convenors of the focus group were very friendly and pleasant, and they felt that they could raise any issues or topics they wanted to in addition to those they were asked about. However, the information and consent forms they received were in English and this proved difficult for many of them. Additionally, while they did ask questions of the focus group convenors, the parents indicated to the evaluation team that no responses were provided. Furthermore, no feedback was received regarding the focus group content for clarification purposes.

Participants felt that, in focusing on the resource packs, information should be provided for and targeted at all immigrant parents, and not just particular cohorts. To this end, participants felt that the resources should be translated into as many different languages as possible, particularly given the language difficulties they (these parents) have experienced in their current location. Other parents also remarked that a dedicated organisation which could respond specifically to the needs of new immigrants, as well as immigrant parents, would be useful. In conclusion, the parents also highlighted that the evaluation focus group should have taken place at a time closer to the original focus group.

2.1.3. Comment

Although short, this focus group reflected many of the findings of the focus groups conducted with both parents and practitioners and detailed in the third interim report furnished to the PMC. Overall, parents viewed it as a positive, comfortable experience which they were happy to participate in. However, parents participating in the evaluation focus group did remark that they received no feedback regarding their comments or answers to any questions they raised in the original focus group.

3.1. Partnership working and development on a multi-sectoral and cross-border basis in regards to the Project Management Committee and more generally in relation to meeting the needs of immigrant parents

3.1.1. Introduction

What follows below is an account and analysis of the work of the PMC over the second part of the first phase of the project (April 2008 – November 2008). Following from this section introduction, the second part provides contextual detail for partnership working of the PMC over the period in question. The short third section details the methodology used in researching and writing this section. The fourth section details the findings from the research while the final section provides some tentative conclusions on the learning from this experience.

3.1.2. Context

The first phase of the ALLiPIP project centred on the development of a number of resources in line with project objectives as stated in the development documents of the project. These resources included: the development of jurisdiction-specific information packs for parents, explaining the operation of particular services and providing information and contact details of a range of services and agencies in each area; a toolkit for practitioners working with immigrant parents; and an accompanying DVD for practitioners to use with parents. Specifically, the second part of this phase involved incorporating learning from a literature review into the development of the resources, their finalisation and publication, and the planning and implementation of a conference on working with immigrant parents. While the ISPCC was responsible for the delivery of these tasks the PMC had overall responsibility for the management of the project and thus, the resources themselves. The envisaged timeframe for the delivery of these resources and the launch of the programme was July 2008.

The PMC has regularly met to discuss the progress of the project and the attainment of goals pertaining to it. These meetings are chaired, are generally on a monthly basis and

are supplemented by large amounts of email and telephone communication between members. As the project moved towards the envisaged date for publication of resources the work required to be undertaken by the PMC increased significantly. This increase in work was further complicated by the nature of the PMC – it being a cross-border, intersectoral body.

It became clear to members of the PMC that significant challenges were emerging regarding its working and the attainment of project goals as initially outlined. These challenges are detailed in section four below. Their emergence prompted a desire amongst PMC members to enter into a process of reflection on the governance experience to date in a spirit of transparency and openness which would culminate in the identification of key learning points for the future. In particular, the group wished to consider its responsiveness to issues as they arose, and the overall capacity of the group to manage the project. The remainder of this report is the result of this process.

3.1.3. Methodology

What follows here is a composite account of the workings of the PMC as provided through a number of interviews conducted in late August, and mid to late October. All interviews were unstructured in nature. The evaluation team asked a limited number of questions for the purposes of clarification but participants were largely permitted to direct the interview and raise issues they felt were salient to the discussion at hand. After each interview was conducted the evaluation team wrote up an account of it and returned it to the interviewee(s) to ensure accuracy and clarity of detail. Additional email clarification was also received from a PMC member.

What is presented below is the result of those confirmed accounts. It provides a narrative of the circumstances which resulted in the current situation, the reflective observations of participants on the narrative, and a short section at the end which addresses some of the issues mentioned. All identities have been protected and all comments are anonymous.

3.1.4. Narrative

The PMC met with the lead organisation for a meeting on 22nd April 2008 to discuss the development of the resources, the planning of a conference relating to the project, and other related issues. At this meeting, some members of the PMC raised concerns about the content of the proposed practitioner resource pack, highlighting that it required considerable additional work. In particular, some members felt that their views were not given consideration by the lead organisation. This opinion was expressed to the chair of the PMC via email. The chair followed up with a phone call to the member six weeks later. PMC members also had difficulties with the information set out in the parental resource pack, in particular that relating (but not exclusive to) the education section. It was the understanding of PMC members that the lead organisation would refer to the Department of Education and Science (DES) website for the most up-to-date information. However, the lead organisation informed some members of the PMC at a much later stage that the information on the DES website was not always easily understood and, thus, had decided not to use it. When the uninformed members came to read the documents they read information which was, in their view, incorrect and necessitating a lot of work.

The PMC members agreed that the resources would be sent to a number of individuals and groups with specific expertise and knowledge in addition to the PMC and ISPCC. These individuals and bodies included the Departments of Education (in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland), Department of Health, Office of Minister for Integration and an independent expert in the UK. As part of this process, a meeting was arranged at the end of May between the ISPCC and representatives from the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) in Northern Ireland to identify problematic areas and outline possible solutions. However, this meeting did not occur. Views differ on why – that a breakdown in communication occurred between the parties which prevented the meeting from happening; that there was a lack of clarity about the work involved in addressing the challenges presented by the resource packs. Instead, a phone call between the lead organisation and a SELB representative took place.

The ISPCC felt that, in receiving responses from some PMC members over the entire course of the project, it was possible to detect that the most recent versions of the resources were not always being read. Some PMC members remarked that feedback about the resources could have been submitted to it and the ISPCC in a timelier manner, i.e. at earlier stages in the development process. The members of the PMC and the ISPCC worked to incorporate comments received after the consultation/review phase on the various resources. Many comments were conflicting in nature and both bodies did what was felt as their best to incorporate as many comments as were reasonable given the timeframe of the project. Yet, despite the review, other members expressed frustration at the continuing presence of inaccurate factual information in the documents. One PMC member requested that in their absence the revised documents be sent to a colleague for comment. However, this did not occur.

Despite the review process dissatisfaction still remained on the part of some PMC members about the content of the materials. An individual member felt they could not sign off on the resources as, despite a number of points of concern being addressed, substantive changes had not been made as they thought they would be (some PMC members felt that when initially proposed, these changes were to address factual errors rather than anything else). However, other PMC members indicated that the parameters of the project were misconstrued; that this was a project which sought to develop resources to be used alongside existing ones rather than replace them and hence, given the timeframe, the desire to publish the resources and have them used, it was crucial that they be signed off on.

As a result of the developments over the period discussed - culminating in the review of the materials instigated - and the continuing dissatisfaction with the resources as they then stood, one PMC member felt they had no option but to resign from the project.

3.1.5. Reflection points of PMC members

Some PMC members highlighted that there may have been a lack of clarity around the role of the PMC and its individual membership, the purpose of the resources and the review process put in place in May/June 2008. For example, it was highlighted to the evaluation team that some PMC members were relative newcomers and may have had a different perception about the focus of the project (that it was about supplementing materials already in existence, not supplanting them). The purpose of the review of the resources also lacked clarity. While some felt it was about ensuring the credibility of the resources, others felt that it presented an opportunity to improve and extend them. Others again felt that the review was simply about correcting inaccurate information and inconsistencies in presentation and expressed frustration that this was not achieved in all cases despite significant additional time being dedicated to it. Some PMC members queried whether sufficient control was maintained over the scope of the project, and considered that maybe the project became too wide in its remit.

Another consideration was the actual membership of the PMC and the purpose of having particular individuals involved. Although some members felt they were part of the process because they brought a particular expertise to it, others felt that while this was the case such members also provided valuable links into organisations – statutory and voluntary – which could enhance the uptake of resources across the country and, more generally, provide credibility to the process. They were sought to participate for this reason (although not exclusively). In this light, some PMC members viewed the outputs and success (or otherwise) of the project as not only a reflection on them individually but also the organisations they worked for. Hence, when incorrect information relating to a particular sector or domain was included in the resources, these members felt it reflected poorly on them and their organisations.

All participants highlighted the make up of the PMC as being an advantage to the attainment of the project goals. In particular, the cross-border nature of the committee was viewed by all as being a particularly strong element of the project and one which should be maintained. Indeed, the cross-border aspect was not identified as being a

contributory factor to the impasse outlined above. However, some participants did wonder whether those members who had difficulties with the resources did so due to organisational pressures, that those organisations feared being associated with the resources as they then stood.

The manner in which the PMC worked was highlighted by all participants as warranting discussion. In particular, the meetings were remarked on as something which tended to focus too much on specific tasks at specific times and failed to take account of the existing workloads of PMC members. It was strongly felt amongst PMC members that either a supplementary meeting was required, or a space created within the existing meeting where people could simply sit and read the materials together. This would have allowed for greater consideration of the materials and a deeper philosophical discussion of the issues relating to the materials to emerge.

All PMC members commented that at an individual level ISPCC staff were very personable, cooperative and approachable. Information was shared in a timely manner, generally work was undertaken when requested, and the response times from staff were excellent. However some PMC members did feel there was a disjoint at some points between what the PMC requested and what the ISPCC produced. Many PMC members questioned the manner in which they collectively (the PMC) exercised control over the accuracy of the work and its content. As highlighted above, the creation of space to consider the content of the materials together and debate, not just their finer points but their overall thrust and spirit, was viewed as desirable and in hindsight, should have been crucial to its work. Some members felt that the PMC should have relied on its own expertise and provided greater input than it did, while also drawing on the experience of the Advisory Committee also.

Additionally, it was mentioned that a previous track record in this type of work (e.g. develop resources such as a manual) should have been a factor in awarding tenders, and this should be essential for the second phase of the project. More important according to

some PMC members is the involvement of an organisation that understands specifically the needs of the immigrant population.

All PMC members agreed on one central point: that in hindsight the project was too ambitious, not in content but in time. Moreover, it was remarked on by many that time and thought should be given to getting the tendering process and recruitment of suitable organisations right. Experience in training should be demonstrated as part of the tender process. A sense of quality rather than quantity should infuse the project's second phase. PMC members should have clarity regarding the aims and objectives, cost, extent, timescales of the next phase of the project so as to be realistic about what future tender submissions involve.

3.1.6. Key Learning from the PMC experience over the past six months

It is clear from the accounts provided to the evaluation team that there is a strong sense of commitment to the project, and consideration of how it is to be progressed from this point on. Many participants indicated the need to evaluate their own positions and what they/the organisations they work for and represent could offer to the project in the forthcoming year given their existing workloads. Furthermore, participants spoke positively about getting other organisations/representatives from other organisations involved in the next phase of the project.

The resignation of a PMC member was viewed by all as unfortunate, and PMC members stressed that this was understandable from the perception of the individual. The individual has made clear to the evaluation team that they are willing to return to the project and work with the materials as they stand. Yet, they also emphasised that an internal PMC mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure that consideration and reflection of all processes and aims of the project from this point on to the satisfaction of all involved.

As part of the evaluation process, the CFRC's second interim report predominantly addressed the theme of partnership working, both across statutory-voluntary boundaries

and across borders. As the research in that report indicated, PMC members were broadly happy with the workings of the committee, although a notable disadvantage of working together was identified – time, the time it takes to travel to meetings for some members and the time required to prepare for meetings. Also, the time delay in taking decisions was identified as a minor disadvantage.

Given the challenges which have presented themselves in recent months it is useful to remind ourselves of the principles which are required to underpin partnership arrangements and the challenges in ‘doing partnership’ (ALLiPIP 2nd Interim Report, pp 10-12). The principles include:

- Acknowledgement of the need to work together;
- Clarity and realism of purpose in working together;
- Commitment and ownership of the process of working together;
- Development and maintenance of trust amongst members;
- Establishment of clear, robust arrangements;
- Monitoring and review of partnership itself.

The challenges of ‘doing partnership’ include:

- Clear and realistic aims and objectives which are understood and accepted by all agencies;
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, so everyone knows what is expected of them and of others, and clear lines of responsibility and accountability;
- Strong leadership and a multi-agency steering or management group;
- An agreed timetable for implementation of changes and an incremental approach to change;
- And ensuring good systems of communication at all levels, with information sharing and adequate IT systems.

Many of these points resonate, particularly given the narrative which has been set out above. It appears to the CFRC from the reflection points identified by the PMC members that many of these challenges presented themselves at a time when workloads were increasing, both within the confines of the project and in existing work within ‘home’ organisations. Communication procedures were not as clear as they needed to be, both within the PMC and between the PMC and the lead organisation. A lack of clarity

around certain procedures during the project – the review of the materials predominantly – was also a feature.

Additionally, while not explicitly mentioned, the role of the advisory committee in the entire process is worth consideration. In undertaking partnership working, whether at the macro or strategic level or the micro policy initiative level, the voice of service users and practitioners is viewed as a critical part of the process. While the advisory committee (AC) meetings supplemented the work both of the lead organisation and the PMC, its role in the development of the resources may have been more than it was given the level of practitioner experience which AC members brought to the project.

Having said this, the resilience of the PMC is evident in its ability to reflect and respond creatively to the challenges which have emerged. Indeed, that the PMC sought the involvement of the evaluation team to document its reflection process is viewed as a very positive development for the future of the project. The proposed reorganisation of both the PMC and the AC into a number of sub-committees comprising existing members of both and new members responsible for overseeing the second phase of the project is also a welcome and positive development.

In addition, in continuing the partnership process into the second phase a number of points may be considered by all those involved:

- Be clear – about what the second phase involves, about which organisations will be involved, and who will be responsible for particular tasks. If collective responsibility is to be exercised, have clear terms of reference and draw up a short document detailing the responsibilities to be held by the committee (s). More importantly perhaps, be clear about what is aspired for in the second phase, agree it and as far as is possible, stick to it;
- Be honest – about the amount of work involved, and what is required to achieve such work. Timelines are prospective indicators of what is hoped to be achieved if everything else falls into place. Flexibility is key in dealing with challenges and

overcoming them so as to achieve stated goals. Doing something quickly for the sake of doing it is rarely the best course of action.

- Be open – particularly with those you work with. Honesty, trust and clarity are the bedrocks of successful partnerships and can only be achieved by forging them from the outset. Communication is important in establishing and maintaining trust, yet can be often overlooked. Instead of emailing one person, or a chair of a group, email everybody in the group. Recognise the expertise around the table.
- Be reflective – always consider the path which you as a group followed to get to a point. Was there another path to take, could something have been done differently? Use past experience to guide future plans and actions.

4.1. Conclusion.

This document details the ongoing evaluation of the ALLiPIP project by the Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway and pays particular attention to the involvement of parents in the development of the resources and the partnership workings of the PMC. Parents who participated in the research and development process generally had a positive experience and spoke warmly of the convivial atmosphere in which the focus group was run. However, they also highlighted some problems with the focus group, such as not receiving feedback on their participation or the views they expressed.

The Project Management Committee has experienced some challenges of late in attempting to drive this process towards the end of phase one in a satisfactory manner. Yet, despite the difficulties and challenges outlined above, all members have indicated to the evaluation team a willingness to continue being part of the process and see it through to the end. The evaluation team found all PMC members honest in their reflections and assertions on the process, and facilitated any clarifications which it required with warmth and goodwill. As part of the learning (but not exclusively) from recent experiences regarding the PMC and the project overall, it has been decided to alter the nature of the ALLiPIP project going into the second phase. In the main, this will involve extending the second (training and awareness raising) phase to two years and the CFRC has agreed to support the PMC in whatever manner it can to see this come to fruition. Indeed, it has

already engaged with members of the PMC regarding the possible tender for the second phase and has submitted a revised evaluation plan to take account of the views of the PMC relating to the evaluation into the future.

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